



Institute for Community Health

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners Healthcare

2007 AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For the love of locally-grown squash: A case study of incorporating local produce into a New England school district.

Virginia Chomitz, PhD; Dawn B. Olcott, MS; Josefina Wendel, MS, RD, LDN; Claire Kozower, MS; Stephanie Shapiro Berkson, MS; Jane Smillie; Hannah Freedberg; Amber Espa; and Jack Mingle.

Background: A collaborative of researchers, educators, food service staff, public health professionals, chefs, school garden programmers and farmers' market advocates have implemented programs and policies to promote local fruits and vegetables to low-income children and provide new markets to local farmers. **Objectives:** This session describes "what it took" to place one locally grown vegetable, with good acceptance by students, onto the menu cycle in an economically and ethnically diverse New England school system with eleven K-8th grade schools. **Methods:** A case study approach was used to describe the process, barriers, and enablers. The process included 1) planning: locating and procuring produce, assessing equipment and staff training needs, 2) recipe and infrastructure development: taste testing and focus groups at schools, enlisting parent volunteer, 3) training: on-site training for staff at each school and all-staff training, 4) institutionalizing: preparing and serving menu item routinely. Student acceptance was measured through taste tests and voting results, and observation of plate waste. **Results:** It took 14 months from first locating a farmer to serving a successful recipe for roasted butternut squash system-wide. **Barriers included:** 1) the farmer's ability to deliver 450 pounds of diced squash, at a specified time, 2) the school's ability to deliver product to 11 sites, 3) staff skepticism and lack of equipment. **Enablers included** 1) a Farm to School Coordinator, 2) an experienced chef for recipe development and staff training, and 3) students and parents being engaged in the process. **Discussion:** Incorporating any new item into a school menu is a slow process; incorporating local produce benefits from including staff, producers, students and parents in each step.